

Cannot  
sign

Copy of a letter of  
Rev. Jas. Martineau.

Please return to S. M. J.



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Liverpool Aug 18<sup>th</sup> 1847.

My dear Mr. James,

From my heart I honour the zeal against wrong which animates you & the other friends who have drawn up the answer to the Boston invitation. And I feel it to be a painful privation, that I cannot join you in a course which the end in view could not but ennoble; if only I could satisfy myself that the means were irreproachable.

As I have never seen the invitation to which your printed enclosure is a reply, I am ignorant of its source & purport, I might excuse myself from signing the answer, on the ground that I do not feel myself a party concerned. But it is better to make the open confession that the document gives expression to sentiments in which I find it impossible to concur.

I cannot but shrink from the denunciation of Slaveholding as a private immorality. It is the misfortune of the Individual; the crime of the State. Created & sustained by Law, existing in communities which have no suitable provisions for the social & political existence of a class of free labourers, it can be annihilated only



by Law; & the main duty of the American citizen of the South, appears to me to consist not in manumission on his estate, but in moving the Legislature to a reform in the constitution of property. I am far from being satisfied that individual emancipation has any tendency to diminish the aggregate guilt & evil of Slavery; there is so much reason to believe that it may even prolong the System, as to render the indiscriminate condemnation of Slaveholders altogether unjust. If I had tidings tomorrow of a bequest to me of an estate with 50 slaves on it, I am not sure that I should not regard it as a criminal evasion of responsibility to manumit them: I should not rather say to the State: "You have no right to forego your duty of recognizing & protecting these people, & to hand them over to my power. Assume the charge of them; undo the injury you have committed by specially tending & guiding them. Hold them under my care, only in trust for you & for themselves." If they require to be treated for some time as children or minors, the individual proprietor may feel that this end is less likely to be attained by an act of emancipation done out of hand than by his holding in practical abeyance all the worst features of the servile State, &



substituting the rule of influence for that of power. Channing himself says, "There are Masters who see Slavery as it is, & who hold the Slave chiefly, if not wholly, from disinterested considerations; & these deserve great praise."

how so long as there are any of whom this is true, the bare fact of being a Master cannot be accepted in proof of indifference to the wrong of Slavery. It proves only an opinion against private manumission; - an opinion which may indeed be the mere dictate of low selfishness; but which may also be the result of thoughtful conscientiousness. A test framed for the exclusion of such a person, might shut out men, who in relation to the Slavery question, "deserve great praise:" yet leave admission open to others culpably indifferent to the whole matter.

To belong to a class benefited by an unjust law is a different thing from claiming the rights of that law, & being personally chargeable with its wrong. We think that the Corn laws were unjust, & gave the landlord what was not his own; but what should we have said to a proposal for excluding all landed owners from the Committee of the British Unitarian Association? Is not the principal the very same?



I must confess that the plan of scrutinizing not the public acts & aims of an Association but the personal composition of its Committee & the private concerns of its members, before rendering a reply to a friendly invitation in which it is a sort of partner, appears to me a somewhat far fetched scrupulosity. So fastidious a rule would lead to results most painful to every good heart, & at variance, as it seems to me, with the conditions of all human cooperation. Nor can the soft words mingled in your reply, remove the impression of eager severity which it leaves. Upon my own perverse heart, were I among its Transatlantic receivers, I fear it would operate only to hurt & harden. May you have to deal with more charitable souls!

This is my honest & (believe me) reluctant feeling on this matter. I deeply regret our differing views; but without at all honouring the less the aims which you pursue.

Believe me ever, my dear Sir,

yrs most faithfully

James Martineau

Rev. W. James.